
GENESIS 35:1 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and live there. Make there an altar to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

Jacob is commanded of God to go to Beth-el, and to build an altar there, Gen 35:1. His exhortation to his family to put away all strange gods, etc., Gen 35:2, Gen 35:3. They deliver them all up, and Jacob hides them in the earth, Gen 35:4. They commence their journey, Gen 35:5; come to Luz, Gen 35:6; build there the altar El-beth-el, Gen 35:7. Burial place of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, Gen 35:8. God appears again unto Jacob, Gen 35:9. Blesses him and renews the promises, Gen 35:10-13. To commemorate this manifestation of God, Jacob sets up a pillar, and calls the place Beth-el, Gen 35:14, Gen 35:15. They journey to Ephrath, where Rachel, after hard labor, is delivered of Benjamin, and dies, Gen 35:16-19. Jacob sets up a pillar on her grave, Gen 35:20. They journey to Edar, Gen 35:21. While at this place, Reuben defiles his father's bed, Gen 35:22. Account of the children of Jacob, according to the mothers, Gen 35:23-26. Jacob comes to Mamre to his father Isaac, who was probably then in the one hundred and fifty-eighth year of his age, Gen 35:27. Isaac dies, and is buried by his sons Esau and Jacob, Gen 35:29.

Verse 1

Arise, go up to Beth-el - The transaction that had lately taken place rendered it unsafe for Jacob to dwell any longer at the city of Shechem; and it seems that while he was reflecting on the horrible act of Simeon and Levi, and not knowing what to do, God graciously appeared to him, and commanded him to go up to Beth-el, build an altar there, and thus perform the vow he had made, Gen 28:20, Gen 28:22.

GENESIS 35:2 Then Jacob said to his household, and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, change your garments."

Verse 2

Put away the strange gods - אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּכַר *elohey hannechar*, the gods of the foreigners, which were among them. Jacob's servants were all Syrians, and no doubt were addicted less or more to idolatry and superstition. These gods might belong to them, or, as some have conjectured, they were the teraphim which Rachel stole; but these have already been supposed to be astrological tables, or something of this kind, called by Laban his gods, because by them he supposed he could predict future events, and that they referred to certain astral and planetary intelligences, by whose influences sublunary things were regulated. But it is more natural to suppose that these gods found now in Jacob's family were images of silver, gold, or curious workmanship, which were found among the spoils of the city of Shechem. Lest these should become incitements to idolatry, Jacob orders them to be put away.

Be clean, and change your garments - Personal or outward purification, as emblematical of the sanctification of the soul, has been in use among all the true worshippers of God from the beginning of the world. In many cases the law of Moses more solemnly enjoined rites and ceremonies which had been in use from the earliest ages. "A Hindoo considers those clothes defiled in which he has been employed in business, and always changes them before eating and worship." - Ward.

GENESIS 35:3 Let us arise, and go up to Bethel. I will make there an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me on the way which I went."

Verse 3

Answered me in the day of my distress - Not only when he fled from the face of his brother, but more particularly when he was in his greatest strait at the brook of Jabbok.

GENESIS 35:4 They gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.

Verse 4

And - ear-rings which were in their ears - Whether these rings were in the ears of the gods, or in those of Jacob's family, we may rest assured that they were not mere ornaments, but served for superstitious purposes. Ear-rings were certainly worn as amulets and charms, first consecrated to some god, or formed under some constellation, on which magical characters and images were drawn. A very ancient and beautiful one of this kind brought from Egypt, cut out of a solid piece of cornelian, now lies before me. It was evidently intended for the ear, as the opening is too small for any human finger; and it is engraved all over with strange characters and images, which prove that it was intended for a talisman or amulet. It seems to be such a one as St. Augustine describes, Epist. 73, which was suspended from the tip of the ears both of men and women, not for the purpose of ornament, but through an execrable superstition, for the service of demons. "Execranda superstitio ligaturarum, in quibus etiam in aures virorum in summis ex una parte auriculis suspensae deputantur, non ad placendum hominibus, sed ad serviendum daemonibus." See Clarke on Gen 24:22 (note).

GENESIS 35:5 They travelled, and a terror of God was on the cities that were around them, and they didn't pursue the sons of Jacob.

Verse 5

The terror of God - A supernatural awe sent by the Almighty, was upon the cities that were round about, so that they were not molested in their departure. This could be owing to nothing less than the especial providence of God.

GENESIS 35:6 So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him.

GENESIS 35:7 He built an altar there, and called the place El Beth El; because there God was revealed to him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

Verse 7

El-beth-el - אל בית אל the strong God, the house of the strong God. But the first אל el is wanting in one of De Rossi's MSS., as it is also in the Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, and some copies of the Arabic. The sentence reads much better without it, and much more consistent with the parallel passages.

GENESIS 35:8 Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; and its name was called Allon Bacuth.

Verse 8

But Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died - She was sent with Rebekah when taken by Abraham's servant to be wife to Isaac, Gen 24:59. How she came to be in Jacob's family, expositors are greatly puzzled to find out; but the text does not state that she was in Jacob's family. Her death is mentioned merely because Jacob and his family had now arrived at the place where she was buried, and the name of that place was called Allon-bachuth, "the oak of weeping," as it is likely her death had been greatly regretted, and a general and extraordinary mourning had taken place on the occasion. Of Rebekah's death we know nothing. After her counsel to her son, Gen 27:5-17, Gen 27:42-46, we hear no more of her history from the sacred writings, except of her burial in Gen 49:31. Her name is written in the dust. And is not this designed as a mark of the disapprobation of God? It seems strange that such an inconsiderable person as a nurse should be mentioned, when even the person she brought up is passed by unnoticed! It has been observed that the nurse of Aeneas is mentioned nearly in the same way by the poet Virgil; and in the circumstances, in both cases, there is a striking resemblance. "Tu quoque littoribus nostris,

Aeneia nutrix, Aeternam moriens famam,
 Caleta, dedisti:
 Eet nunc servat honos sedem tunus; ossaque nomen,
 Hesperia in magna, (si qua est en gloria), signat.
 At pius exequils Aeneas rite solutis,
 Aggere composito tumuli, postquam alta quierunt
 Aequora, tendit iter veils, portumque relinquit."
 Aen., lib. vii., ver. 1, etc. "Thou too, Cajeta, whose indulgent cares
 Nursed the great chief, and form'd his tender years,
 Expiring here (an ever-honor'd name!)
 Adorn Hesperia with immortal fame:
 Thy name survives, to please thy pensive ghost;
 Thy sacred relics grace the Latian coast.
 Soon as her funeral rites the prince had paid,
 And raised a tomb in honor of the dead;
 The sea subsiding, and the tempests o'er,
 He spreads the flying sails, and leaves the shore."
 Pitt.

GENESIS 35:9 God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan Aram, and blessed him.

Verse 9

God appeared unto Jacob again - He appeared to him first at Shechem, when he commanded him to go to Bethel, and now that he is arrived at the place, God appears to him the second time, and confirms to him the Abrahamic blessing. To Isaac and Jacob these frequent appearances of God were necessary, but they were not so to Abraham; for to him one word was sufficient - Abraham believed God.

GENESIS 35:10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob. Your name shall not be Jacob any more, but your name will be Israel." He named him Israel.

GENESIS 35:11 God said to him, "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations will be from you, and kings will come out of your body.

GENESIS 35:12 The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and to your seed after you will I give the land."

GENESIS 35:13 God went up from him in the place where he spoke with him.

Verse 13

And God went up from him - This was not a vision, nor a strong mental impression, but a real manifestation of God. Jacob saw and heard him speak, and before his eyes he went up - ascended to heaven. This was no doubt the future Savior, the Angel of the covenant. See Gen 16:7.

GENESIS 35:14 Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he spoke with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it.

Verse 14

A drink-offering - $\gamma\sigma\iota$ nesech, a libation. These were afterwards very common in all countries. At first they consisted probably of water only, afterwards wine was used; see on Lev 7:1 (note), etc. The pillar which Jacob set up was to commemorate the appearance of God to him; the drink-offering and the oil were intended to express his gratitude and devotion to his preserver. It was probably the same pillar which he had set up before, which had since been thrown down, and which he had consecrated afresh to God.

GENESIS 35:15 Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him "Bethel".

GENESIS 35:16 They travelled from Bethel. There was still some distance to come to Ephrath, and Rachel travailed. She had hard labour.

Verse 16

There was but a little way to come to Ephrath - The word כִּבְרַת kibrath, translated here a little way, has greatly perplexed commentators. It occurs only here, in Gen 48:7, and 2Kgs 5:19; and it seems to have been some sort of measure applied to land, as we say a mile, an acre, a rood, a perch; but what the exact quantity of the kibrath was cannot be ascertained. Ephrath, called also Bethlehem, and Bethlehem Ephrata, was the birthplace of our blessed Redeemer. See its meaning Mat 2:6 (note).

GENESIS 35:17 When she was in hard labour, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for now you will have another son."

GENESIS 35:18 As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Benoni, but his father named him Benjamin.

Verse 18

As her soul was in departing - Is not this a proof that there is an immortal spirit in man, which can exist separate from and independent of the body? Of Rachel's death it is said, בְּצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ betseth naphshah, in the going away of her soul; her body did not go away, therefore her soul and body must have been distinct. If her breath only had been intended, נִשְׁמָה neshamah or רוּחַ ruach would have rather been used, as the first means breath, the latter breath or spirit indifferently.

She called his name Ben-oni - בֶּן אֹנִי the Son of my sorrow or affliction, because of the hard labor she had in bringing him into the world; but his father called him Benjamin, בְּנִימִין the son of my right hand, i.e., the son peculiarly dear to me. So man of the right hand, Psa 80:17, signifies one much loved and regarded of God. The Samaritan has Benyamin, the son of days; i.e., the son of his old age, as Judah calls him, Gen 44:20; and Houbigant contends that this is the true reading, and that the Chaldee termination in for im is a corruption. If it be a corruption, it is as old as the days of St. Jerome, who translated the place Benjamin, id est, filius dextrae; Benjamin, that is, the son of the right hand.

GENESIS 35:19 Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Ephrath (the same is Bethlehem).

GENESIS 35:20 Jacob set up a pillar on her grave. The same is the Pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

Verse 20

Jacob set a pillar upon her grave - Was not this the origin of funeral monuments? In ancient times, and among rude nations, a heap of stones designated the burial place of the chief; many of these still remain in different countries. Afterwards a rude stone, with a simple inscription, was used, containing only the name of the deceased, and that of his father. But where arts and sciences flourished, superb monuments were erected highly decorated, and pompously inscribed. It is very likely from the circumstances of Jacob that a single stone constituted the pillar in this case, on which, if writing did then exist, the name, or rather some hieroglyphical device, was probably inscribed. That which is now called Rachel's pillar is allowed, by those who have examined it, to be a comparatively modern structure.

GENESIS 35:21 Israel travelled, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

Verse 21

Tower of Eder - Literally, the tower of the flock, and so translated Mic 4:8. It is supposed that this tower was about a mile from Bethlehem, and to have been the place where the angels appeared to the shepherds. The Targum of Jonathan expressly says: "It is the place in which the King Messiah shall be manifested in the end of days." By the tower of the flock we may understand a place built by the shepherds near to some well, for the convenience of watering their flocks, and keeping watch over them by night.

GENESIS 35:22 While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Israel heard of it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve.

Verse 22

Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine - Jonathan, in his Targum, says that Reuben only overthrew the bed of Bilhah, which was set up opposite to the bed of his mother Leah, and that this was reputed to him as if he had lain with her. The colouring given to the passage by the Targumist is, that Reuben was incensed, because he found Bilhah preferred after the death of Rachel to his own mother Leah; and therefore in his anger he overthrew her couch. The same sentiment is repeated by Jonathan, and glanced at by the Jerusalem Targum, Gen 49:4. Could this view of the subject be proved to be correct, both piety and candour would rejoice.

And Israel heard it - Not one word is added farther in the Hebrew text; but a break is left in the verse, opposite to which there is a Masoretic note, which simply states that there is a hiatus in the verse. This hiatus the Septuagint has thus supplied: *καὶ ἐπὶ πονηρὸν ἐφάνη ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ*, and it appeared evil in his sight.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve - Called afterwards the twelve patriarchs, because they became heads or chiefs of numerous families or tribes, Act 7:8; and the people that descended from them are called the twelve tribes, Act 26:7; Jam 1:1. Twelve princes came from Ishmael, Gen 25:16, who were heads of families and tribes. And in reference to the twelve patriarchs, our Lord chose twelve apostles. Strictly speaking, there were thirteen tribes among the Hebrews, as Ephraim and Manasses were counted for tribes, Gen 48:5, Gen 48:6; but the Scripture in naming them, says Mr. Ainsworth, usually sets down but twelve, omitting the name now of one, then of another, as may in sundry places be observed, Deuteronomy 33; Ezekiel 48; Revelation 12, etc.

GENESIS 35:23 The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

Verse 23

The sons of Leah - The children are arranged under their respective mothers, and not in order of their birth.

GENESIS 35:24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

GENESIS 35:25 The sons of Bilhah (Rachel's handmaid): Dan and Naphtali.

GENESIS 35:26 The sons of Zilpah (Leah's handmaid): Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.

Verse 26

Born to him in Padan-aram - i.e., all but Benjamin was born in Canaan, Gen 35:16, Gen 35:17.

It is well known that Padan-aram is the same as Mesopotamia, and hence the Septuagint translate Μεσοποταμια της Συριας, Mesopotamia of Syria. The word signifies between the two rivers, from μεσος the midst, and ποταμος, a river. It is situated between the Euphrates and Tigris, having Assyria on the east, Arabia Deserta, with Babylonia, on the south, Syria on the west, and Armenia on the north. It is now the province of Diarbek, in Asiatic Turkey, and is sometimes called Maverannahar, the country beyond the river; and Aram Naharaim, Aram or Syria of the two rivers.

GENESIS 35:27 Jacob came to Isaac his father, to Mamre, to Kiriath Arba (which is Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac lived as foreigners.

Verse 27

The city of Arbah, (which is Hebron) - See Gen 23:2. It has been conjectured that Jacob must have paid a visit to his father before this time, as previously to this he had been some years in Canaan; but now, as he was approaching to his end, Jacob is supposed to have gone to live with and comfort him in his declining days.

GENESIS 35:28 The days of Isaac were one hundred eighty years.

GENESIS 35:29 Isaac gave up the spirit, and died, and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. Esau and Jacob, his sons, buried him.

Verse 29

Isaac gave up the ghost - and was gathered unto his people - See Clarke on Gen 25:8 (note).

Esau and Jacob buried him - See Gen 25:9. Esau, as we have seen Genesis 33, was thoroughly reconciled to his brother Jacob, and now they both join in fraternal and filial affection to do the last kind office to their amiable father. It is generally allowed that the death of Isaac is mentioned here out of its chronological order, as several of the transactions mentioned in the succeeding chapters, especially 37 and 38, must have happened during his life; but that the history of Joseph might not be

disturbed, his death is anticipated in this place. It is supposed that he lived at least twelve years after Joseph was sold into Egypt.

This chapter contains several subjects which are well worthy of the reader's most serious attention.

1. That such a family as that of Jacob should have had false gods in it, is a matter not less astonishing than real: and suppose that we allow, as is very probable, that their images and rings were got from strangers, the Syrians and the Shechemites, yet their being tolerated in the family, though it is probable this was for a very short time, cannot be easily accounted for. It is true the Law was not then given, and the unity of God not so particularly taught as it was afterwards. Besides, we have already seen that certain superstitions were compatible in those early times with general sincerity and attachment to the truth; those times and acts of ignorance were winked at, till superior light shone upon the world. Between many of the practices of Laban's family and those of the surrounding heathenish tribes, there might have been but little difference; and this was probably the reason why Dinah could so readily mix with the daughters of the land, Gen 34:1, which led to the fatal consequences already reviewed. Sin is like the letting out of water - when once a breach is made in the dyke, the stream becomes determined to a wrong course, and its progress is soon irresistible. Had not Jacob put away these strange gods, the whole family might have been infected with idolatry. This saying of one of the ancients is good, *Vitia transmittit ad posterios, qui praesentibus culpis ignoscit* - Seneca. "He who is indulgent to present offenses, transmits sin to posterity." The first motions of it should be firmly resisted; after struggles are too often fruitless.

2. The doctrine of a particular and especial providence has another proof in this chapter. After the sanguinary conduct of Jacob's sons, is it not surprising that the neighboring tribes did not join together and extirpate the whole family? And so they certainly would, had not the terror of God fallen upon them, Gen 35:5. Jacob and the major part of his family were innocent of this great transgression; and on the preservation of their lives, the accomplishment of great events depended: therefore God watches over them, and shields them from the hands of their enemies.

3. The impatience and fate of the amiable Rachel, who can read of without deploring? Give me children, said she, or else I die, Gen 30:1. Her desire was granted, and her death was the consequence! God's way is ever best. We know not what we ask, nor what we ought to ask, and therefore often ask amiss when we petition for such secular things as belong to the dispensations of God's providence. For things of this kind we have no revealed directory; and when we ask for them, it should be with the deepest submission to the Divine will, as God alone knows what is best for us. With respect to the soul, every thing is clearly revealed, so that we may ask and receive, and have a fullness of joy; but as to our bodies, there is much reason to fear that the answer of our petitions would be, in numerous cases, our inevitable destruction. How many prayers does God in mercy shut out!

4. The transgression of Reuben, of whatsoever kind, was marked, not only by the displeasure of his father, but by that of God also; see Gen 49:4. It brought a curse upon him, and he forfeited thereby the right of primogeniture and the priesthood: the first was given to Judah, the second to Levi. Is it not in reference to this that our Lord addresses these solemn words to the angel of the Church of Philadelphia: Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that No Man Take Thy Crown? A man, by sowing a grain of forbidden sweets, may reap an abundant harvest of eternal wretchedness. Reader, let not sin rob thee of the kingdom of God.

5. Here we have the death of Isaac recorded: most that can be said of his character has been already anticipated, see Genesis 22, etc. He appears to have been generally pious, deeply submissive and

obedient. He was rather an amiable and good, than a great and useful, man. If compared with his son Jacob, in the early part of their lives, he appears to great advantage, as possessing more sincerity and more personal piety. But if compared with his father Abraham, O, what a falling off is here! Abraham is the most perfect character under the Old Testament, and even under the New he has no parallel but St. Paul. Isaac, though falling far short of his father's excellences, will ever remain a pattern of piety and filial obedience.